

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LA PAZ 00690 262105Z
ACTION ARA-10

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FOR ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY LUERS

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: CASC, BL
SUBJECT: AMERICAN PRISONERS IN BOLIVIA

REF: (A) LA PAZ 0654, (B) STATE 15292

1. MINISTER INTERIOR OPENED CONVERSATION WITH ME EVENING OF JANUARY 25 BY SAYING HE CONTINUES TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE U.S. PRISONERS AND THE PROPOSED TEAM VISIT. HE SAID THE GOB REVIEW OF EACH CASE IS UNDERWAY AND IN THAT CONNECTION HE HANDED ME A TWELVE PAGE DOCUMENT PREPARED BY DNSP AT THIS DIRECTION LISTING EACH PRISONER, DATE OF ARREST, CHARGES, STATUS OF LEGAL PROCEEDING, DATE OR PRISONER'S STATEMENT, EVIDENCE, AND A RECOMMENDATION FOR DISPOSITION FOR EACH CASE. MINISTER SAID HE HAS CONCLUDED THAT ABOUT TWELVE CASES COULD BE RESOLVED WITHIN THIRTY DAYS WITH PRISONERS FREED FROM JAIL AND EXPELLED. OTHER CASES INVOLVE MORE SERIOUS OFFENSES AND WILL CONTINUE IN JUDICIAL PROCESS UNDER NEW LAW.

2. MINISTER SAID HE BELIEVED THAT THIS ACTION SHOULD SATISFY PARTIES CONCERNED AND THUS PRECLUDE TEAM VISIT. I EXPLAINED
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COMPOSITION OF TEAM, ITS OBJECTIVES, AND USED LANGUAGE FROM STATE 15292. I SUGGESTED THAT TEAM VISIT MIGHT BE VIEWED AS STEP IN COORDINATION WITH GOB ACTION. MINISTER WAS NOT CONVINCED. HE SPOKE OF PERSONS WHO HAVE INVOLVED THEMSELVES WITH PRISONERS AND WHO SEEM TO WANT TO CREATE PUBLIC SCANDAL RATHER THAN HELP PRISONERS. HE CITED JACK ANDERSON ARTICLE BASED ON "SENSITIVE SOURCES IN BOLIVIA" AS EXAMPLE. MINISTER

SAID TEAM WOULD GET ONE-SIDED VIEW OF SITUATION BY CONCENTRATING ON STORIES AND ALLEGATIONS FROM PRISONERS. HE SAID THAT HE HAS HEARD REPORT THAT TEAM WANTS TO INVESTIGATE DEA ACTIVITIES AND THAT PRISONERS WILL WISH TO DISCREDIT DEA/DNSP ANTI-NARCOTICS EFFORTS. HE ALSO NOTED THAT PRISONER'S ACCOUNTS ARE USUALLY HIGHLY EXAGGERATED. HE SAID THAT LENGTHY DETENTION CAN BE ATTRIBUTED IN LARGE MEASURE TO DESIRES OF MANY PRISONERS AND THEIR ATTORNEYS TO AWAIT NEW LAW. MINISTER SAID HE WAS WORKING IN GOOD FAITH TO RESOLVE CASES HE COULD. AS TO JAIL CONDITIONS, HE SAID, THEY ARE DEPLORABLE AND HE IS TAKING STEPS TO OBTAIN FINANCING FOR A NEW JAIL. HE WONDERED ALOUD WHETHER ANY EXTERNAL SOURCES OF FINANCING WERE AVAILABLE.

3. I REPEATED TO HIM THE INFORMATION FROM THE CABLE. I SAID THE TEAM WAS A SERIOUS ONE, WITH ABLE AND EXPERIENCED MEMBERS. I SAID THE DEPT DID NOT PLAN PUBLICITY BUT HAS NO WAY OF CONTROLLING NON-OFFICIAL PERSONS PROVIDING INFORMATION TO THE PRESS. I SAID THAT AN EMBASSY OFFICER WILL ACCOMPANY THE TEAM ON EACH VISIT TO THE JAILS. ALSO I STRESSED MY VIEW THAT A CONVERSATION BETWEEN HIM AND THE TEAM WOULD BE BENEFICIAL TO THE TEAM'S UNDERSTANDING. THE MINISTER VERY RELUCTANTLY SAID THAT IF THE TEAM MUST COME, THEN LET IT COME. BUT, HE SAID, HE WOULD PREFER THAT THE DEPT HOLD OFF, ANALYZE HIS ACTIONS ON THE CASES, AND THEN DECIDE WHETHER THERE IS A NEED TO COME. I TOLD HIM I WOULD CABLE HIS VIEWS TO THE DEPT AND AWAIT INSTRUCTIONS.

4. MY RECOMMENDATION IS TO TAKE THE MINISTER AT HIS WORD, HOLD OFF FOR THIRTY DAYS, GIVE HIM A CHANCE TO FULFILL HIS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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COMMITMENT. IN A SENSE THIS SCENARIO KEEPS MORE PRESSURE ON AND HAS THE BENEFIT OF RETAINING A HIGHER DEGREE OF U.S. CONFIDENCE IN THE MINISTER, WITH WHOM WE HAVE OTHER KEY INTERESTS UNDERWAY. VERY IMPORTANTLY, THIS MIGHT ALSO BE MORE ADVANTAGEOUS FOR THE PRISONERS THEMSELVES. THE MINISTER HAS ALWAYS KEPT HIS WORD TO US, ALTHOUGH HE HAS OFTEN BEEN SLOW. HE IS SERIOUS ABOUT THE PRISONER CASES AND I BELIEVE WILL DO EVERY THING POSSIBLE TO COMPLY.

5. FOOTNOTE: THE NEW DRUG LAW WAS FORMALLY PROMULGATED JANUARY 25 IN THE OFFICIAL GAZETTE. WILL CABLE DECREE NUMBER AND AIR POUCH COPY. THE MINISTER CONFIRMED THE LIGHTER SENTENCES FOR SIMPLE POSSESSION, CREDIT AGAINST SENTENCES FOR TIME AWAITING JUDICIAL DETERMINATION, AND CONDITIONAL LIBERTY. OTHER LEGAL QUESTIONS REMAIN FOR US TO ATTEMPT TO ANSWER.
STEDMAN

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